

CHAPTER ONE

In the Beginning

"We'll find the place which God for us prepared.
Far away in the West;
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the Saints will be blessed."

The soft strains of the congregational singing ended and the small group of worshippers bowed their heads in prayer.

"Father, we thank thee for peace in these valleys of the tops of the mountains," spoke William Wall, presiding elder of Provo Valley. His voice filled the small meeting house with expressions of gratitude for blessings enjoyed by the saints who lived in the valley. As those in the group joined in speaking "Amen" at the end of the humble prayer, each heart echoed gratitude for the blessings of a happy life.

Blessings?

They were seated on rough-hewn log benches placed in a 20 by 40 foot log hut with a dirt floor and two fireplaces one at each end of the room. All their seed had been dropped into hastily plowed furrows with a fervent prayer that frosts would not come quickly. Their log homes, plastered with mud, needed new roofs after heavy rains. And there was always the threat of attacking Indians.

Yet, as they sat in the log meeting house they raised their voices in song and prayer, expressing humble appreciation for the blessings they had been given by Almighty God.

The year was 1860 and the rough wilderness country of what was then called Provo Valley had been under the taming hand of settlers for about a year. During the Spring of 1859 the first permanent settlers had crossed to the eastern slopes of the Wasatch Mountains to establish homes and farms in the valleys of the Provo River headwaters.

In that first year the struggles of settling a new land challenged the stamina and faith of even the most hardy pioneers. Yet their physical courage and spiritual strength enabled them to lay the foundation of a valley that has been marked during the years by peace, modest prosperity and abiding spirituality.

It is believed that the first white men to travel through Wasatch County were Catholic priests. Through the conquests of Hernando Cortez, Spaniards claimed the western part of the United States and in 1776 a party of explorers headed by two Franciscan friars traveled through the northwestern areas of the county.